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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 001237

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: INFORMATION FOR COUNTRY REVIEW REGARDING TITLE  
III OF LIBERTAD ACT

REF: A) STATE 115416; B) BUENOS AIRES 0614

CLASSIFIED BY: Tom Kelly, DCM; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1. (U) Post answers to questions in paragraph 5 of reftel A follow.

2. (C) "Has the host country, in Post's opinion, worked to promote the advancement of democracy and human rights in Cuba." Answer: No. President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner visited Cuba January 18-21 and did not publicly advocate for reforms, human rights or democracy, nor did she meet with civil society or dissident groups.

3. (SBU) After years of quiet but sometimes public advocacy, the Government of Argentina prevailed on Cuban authorities to permit dissident Doctor Hilda Molina to visit her son and his Argentine family in Argentina in June of this year, concluding what had been a long-running issue between the two governments. On June 16, President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner received Dr. Molina at the Presidential Palace. Although Molina said she asked that Argentina work for a Cuba in which "Cubans would be free without having to request anyone's permission," the meeting was reportedly largely focused on family and not on political issues. President Kirchner had earlier issued a statement praising the "important gesture" of the government of Raul Castro. The statement also saluted "the person who has been Cuba's President for so many years, Commander Fidel Castro."

4. (SBU) "Has the host country made public statements or undertaken other governmental actions, such as resolutions in national assemblies condemning human rights abuses in Cuba; or actions in support of civil society in Cuba through the host country's diplomatic missions or other fora?" No.

5. (SBU) "Have there been any high-level diplomatic visits between Cuba and the host country in the past six months?"

Answer: No.

6. (SBU) "What is the nature of investments (and names, if known) that host country businesses have in Cuba?" Answer: The GoA imposes no requirement to register foreign direct investment. The Embassy Economic Section has consulted contacts at the Foreign Ministry and at the Argentine Government Investment Agency, ProsperAr. Officials from both agencies indicate that they know of no significant Argentine investments in Cuba. Post has also checked

Argentine media outlets and has not uncovered any major investments by Argentine nationals or Argentine public corporations in Cuba.

17. (SBU) "Are there any bilateral trade agreements or other cooperative agreements between host country and Cuba?" Answer: The governments of Argentina and Cuba signed a regional preferential trade agreement through MERCOSUR, during the MERCOSUR summit in Cordoba, Argentina, on July 21, 2006. Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay are also parties of this ALADI (Asociacion Latinoamericana de Integracion) agreement. MERCOSUR reports that this agreement consolidated prior bilateral trade agreements that MERCOSUR member nations had earlier signed with Cuba under ALADI auspices. In Argentina's case, it consolidated a prior ALADI agreement on Regional preferences, signed December 30, 1999. Argentina and Cuba are parties to at least seven other ALADI multilateral agreements, covering trade, technology transfer, and cultural, educational, and scientific exchange, among other issues.

18. (SBU) The MFA's public records indicate that Argentina signed a preferential trade agreement with Cuba in 1984. The MFA also reports that a bilateral Argentina-Cuba agreement designed to facilitate trade finance via the establishment of Cuban escrow accounts was signed in August 2004, but has never taken effect. The two countries also have a Bilateral Investment Treaty, ratified in 1997. In June 2008, the Governments of Cuba and Argentina signed a commercial exchange agreement under which Argentina was to

purchase four million energy efficient light bulbs from Cuba in return for Cuban purchases of an equivalent value of Argentine foodstuffs. This transaction does not appear in 2008 trade figures, so it may have been delayed indefinitely.

19. (SBU) Presidents Fernandez de Kirchner and Raul Castro signed 11 agreements during the January 2009 state visit to Cuba which covered the following issues:

- Agreement for the reciprocal elimination of visa requirements for official passports.

- Memorandum of understanding in the area of humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

- Agreement about the state of bilateral scientific and technical cooperation.

- Agreement to cooperate in trade promotion and technology transfer.

- Memorandum of understanding on labor cooperation.

- Framework agreement on health promotion including research and development and joint production of strategic medicines.

- Agreement on the efficient use of energy.

- Memorandum of understanding on cooperation and technical assistance in mining.

- Memorandum of understanding on the peaceful use of nuclear energy

- Memorandum of understanding on technical cooperation in agriculture, food production, forestry, biotechnology and rural development.

- Framework agreement for the creation of a bi-national Argentine-Cuban Center for biotechnology.

¶10. (SBU) Foreign Ministry contacts state that the GOA and GOC have yet to resolve the bilateral debt that Cuba owes Argentina, which amounts to about USD 2.7 billion. This debt dates to Cuban purchases in the 1970s of Argentine products (mainly cars). Because of this debt, Argentine banks -- public and private -- will not provide unsecured trade finance facilities to the GOC.

¶11. (SBU) "Are there exchange programs between Cuba and Argentina"? Answer: Yes. According the Embassy of Cuba website, Cuba has sponsored its "Yes, I can" literacy program in the country since 2003, reaching over 15,000 persons in 25 municipalities, across 10 provinces. It opened a new center in April of this year. Some Argentine citizens have also benefited from "Operation Miracle," a joint GOC-Government of Venezuela initiative that provides free eye operations to low income people. The General Workers

Confederation (CGT), the main Argentine labor union confederation, actively participates in both programs. The website also reports that the GOC has sponsored a group of 60 Argentine students to study at its Latin American School of Medicine, from which 160 Argentines have already graduated. It also reported that some 900 Argentines are studying in Cuba at ELAM, the International School of Physical Education and Sports, as well as other universities. The website also reported free medical care provided by Cuban doctors through Cuban NGO Proposal Tatu.  
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